

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGUI 00079 181318Z
ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 0079

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, CT, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH SUPPORT FOR THE BOKASSA REGIME

REF: BANGUI 0022

SUMMARY: THE SIGNS ARE BEGINNING TO MUTLIPLY THAT FRANCE
WISHES TO PUT A DEGREE OF DISTANCE BETWEEN ITSELF AND THE CAE,
AS IT WAITS TO SEE HOW THE POLITICAL SYSTEM EVOLVES. END SUMMARY

1. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT GISCARD SENT CONGRATULATIONS TO BOKASSA
ON HIS ELEVATION TO THE IMPERIAL PURPLE (ONE OF ONLY HALF A
DOZEN SUCH MESSAGES SENT BY FOREIGN HEADS OF STATE) AND NEW
YEAR'S GREETINGS, THEY WERE FAR LESS FULSOME THAN MESSAGES IN
THE PAST. MOST LOCAL OBSERVERS CONSIDERED THEM AS THE ABSOLUTE
MINIMUM COMMENSURATE WITH THE OCCASION, AND INTERPRETED THAM AS
SIGNS OF A COOLING IN FRANCO-CAE RELATIONS.

2. MORE IMPORTANT THAN CEREMONIAL GESTURES, HOWEVER, ARE TWO
TANGIBLE ELEMENTS OF ANY FUTURE FRANCO-CENTRAL AFICAN RELATION-
SHIP: BOKASSA'S TRAVEL TO FRANCE; AND THE LEVEL OF FRENCH AID.
ON BOTH SCORES THERE IS NOW SOME EVIDENCE THAT FRANCE IS
SEEKING TO LOWER ITS PROFILE.

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3. FRENCH AMBASSADOR PICQUET HAS TOLD ME IN GREAT CONFIDENCE OF
THE CURRENT STATUS OF BOKASSA'S PROPOSED VISIT TO PARIS. IN AN
AUDIENCE WHICH PICQUET HAD WITH BOKASSA JUST BEFORE THE NEW YEAR,
BOKASSA EXPLICITLY SAID THAT HE HOPED HIS FIRST OFFICIAL TRAVEL
OUTSIDE OF THE CAE AFTER HIS CTRONATION WOULD BE TO FRANCE.
PICQUET REPORTED THIS DESIRE TO PARIS, AND HAS JUST LEARNED FROM
AN ADVISOR AT THE ELYSEE THAT AN OFFICIAL VISIT IN 1977 IS OUT OF

THE QUESTION. PICQUET SAID HE HAS BEEN TOLE TO MAINTAIN THE RELATIVELY LOW-KEY POSTURE WHICH HE HAS ADOPTED SINCE HIS ARRIVAL IN NOVEMBER.

4. WITH REGARD TO AID, ON WHICH THE ECONOMY DEPENDS, THERE IS NO INTENTION TO TAKE DRAMATIC STEPS OR TO BREAK WITH THE NEW REGIME. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO PICQUET WHOSE AID DIRECTOR HAS JUST RETURNED FROM TEN DAYS CONSULTATION IN PARIS, FRENCH AID IS GOING TO BE SOMEWHAT REDUCED. THE NUMBER OF COOPERANTS FOR 77-78 WILL GO DOWN BY 10 PERCENT. (IT HAD ALREADY DECLINED SLIGHTLY LAST YEAR.) IN ADDITION, A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF AID IN THE PIPELINE AND PROGRAMMED FOR THE COMING YEAR WILL NOT COME TO THE CAE AS A TRANSFER OF RESOURCES BUT WILL GO TO PAY OFF THE VERY SUBSTANTIAL CAE DEBTS TO FRANCE.

5. IN PICQUET'S VIEW HIS GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY IS ONE OF "WAIT AND SEE". PARIS IS RELUCTANT TO MAKE MAJOR NEW COMMITMENTS TO BOKASSA AT THIS TIME, GIVEN THE UNCERTAIN PROGNOSIS FOR THE EMPIRE. FRANCE WOULD WELCOME THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION, BUT IS BY NO MEANS CETAIN THAT IT WILL COME ABOUT. IN ADDITION, FRANCE HAS IMPORTANT ECONOMIC STAKES IN THE CAE AND WELCOMES THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SUPPORT WHICH BOKASSA PROVIDES. NONETHELESS, ITQ INTERESTS ARE RELATIVELY MODEST, AND THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT WISH TO COMPROMISE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER MORE IMPORTANT FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES BY OVERLY-CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH AN EMPIRE INCREASINGLY RIDICULED IN AFRICA, AND WHICH HAS YET TO SHOW ITS STAYING POWER. WE ASSUME THAT THESE MODIFICATIONS IN FRANCE'S POLICY CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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A VIOLENT REACTION FROM BOKASSA. THE EMPEROR CONTINUES TO NEED

FRANCE FAR MORE THAN THE REVERSE, AND, WHILE PICQUET MAY HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME IN THE MONTHS TO COME, WE DO NOT EXPECT BOKASSA TO PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION.

6. WE WOULD WELCOME PARIS' VIEWS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF FRANCE-CAE RELATION, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTORS IN FRANCE, OR BROADER AFRICAN CONSIDERATIONS, ARE AT THE ROOT OF THESE CHANGES. IN ANY DISCUSSION WITH GOF OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PROTECT PICQUET, WHO HAS BEEN UNUSUALLY FRANK IN SHARING WITH ME SENSITIVE TELEGRAMS AND REPORTS. QUANTON

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